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Senior Health and Wellness Newsletter

Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living

Protein

Protein is a vital part of our diet. It serves a large variety of purposes such as building, maintaining, and repairing all body tissues. Protein also makes up the components of antibodies to help fight viruses and bacteria, assists in the formation of DNA, provides structural components of cells, and transports nutrients throughout the body. It is crucial that we get enough of both protein and carbohydrates in our diet daily. If we don't get enough carbohydrates, protein will be used as energy and thus all of the tasks listed above will suffer.

Protein can be found in animal sources such as meat, fish, and eggs, as well as, plant sources such as beans, soy, nuts, and seeds. Eating a variety of protein sources will help ensure we get the most nutrients while limiting fat and cholesterol. We need 5-7 ounces of protein per day. An ounce of protein is 1 egg, 1/4 cup cooked beans, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter or enough nuts to cover the palm of your hand.

Tips for choosing proteins.

Choose lean or low fat meats. For beef, choose round, sirloin, roasts, or ground beef that is at least 90% lean. For pork, choose pork loin, tenderloin, or center loin. Buy skinless chicken or remove the skin before cooking. For luncheon meats, choose lean turkey, roast beef, or ham instead of bologna or salami.

Eggs are a great source of protein. The yolk contains saturated fat and cholesterol so you may



want to limit those to 3-4 per week but you can eat as many egg whites as you want.

Try adding more beans to your diet. Beans have similar nutrients as meats. Beans are a great source of protein and are naturally low in saturated fat and high in fiber, iron and zinc. These include kidney beans, pinto beans, black beans, lima beans, black-eyed peas, garbanzo beans (chickpeas), split peas, and lentils.

Nuts and seeds make a good protein filled snack. They can also be added to many foods such as casseroles or salads. It only takes a small amount to get the protein you need so keep the portion small to avoid getting too many calories and too much sodium.

Cook your proteins lean.

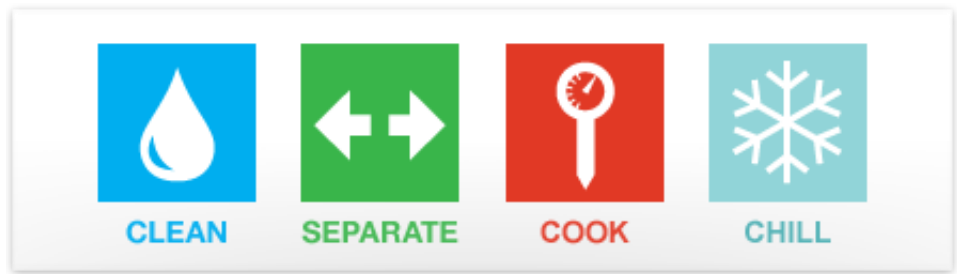
Trim and drain any fat that might be visible. Broil, grill, roast, or boil instead of frying. Prepare beans with little to no added fat.

Check the nutrition facts label to compare products and find proteins that are low in sodium, saturated and trans fats, and cholesterol.

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Keep proteins safe by following food safety guidelines.

Protein foods are very susceptible to food safety concerns. It is important that we treat our proteins using safe processes, as follows:



- Wash your hands thoroughly before handling foods.
- Keep meat separate from other foods at all times during shopping and storage.
- Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, seafood or eggs.
- Don't wash or rise meats.
- Wash cutting boards, knives, utensils, and counters tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food.
- Store meats on the bottom shelf in the refrigerator so juices don't drip on other foods.
- Use a thermometer to be sure you are cooking to safe temperatures.
 - Roasts, steaks, and fish—minimum of 145°F
 - All poultry—minimum of 165°F
 - Pork— minimum of 160°F
 - Casseroles and Leftovers—minimum of 165°F
- Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, eggs and other perishables as soon as you get them home from the store.
- Never let raw or cooked meat, poultry, or eggs sit at room temperature more than two hours before putting them in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Thaw foods properly. Place foods in the refrigerator, submerge sealed foods in cold tap water that is changed every 30 minutes, or defrost on a plate in the microwave.

For more information:

- ChooseMyPlate.gov—<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>
- Dietary Guidelines for Americans—<http://www.health.gov/DietaryGuidelines/>
- Partnership for Food Safety Education—<http://www.fightbac.org/>

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